

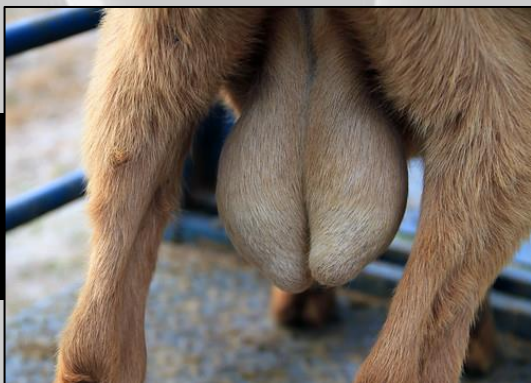
PROTECTING THE FAMILY JEWELS

The scrotum plays a crucial role in the reproductive health and function of rams and bucks. Its primary purpose is to house and protect the testicles, which are responsible for producing sperm and the hormone testosterone. The scrotum helps to regulate the temperature of the testicles for optimal sperm production. The testicles must be several degrees cooler than body temperature for production of healthy viable sperm.



Rams/bucks should have two testicles of equal size. A male with one testicle will be fertile, but his condition (cryptorchidism) is hereditary so he should not be used for breeding. The testicles should feel firm, like a flexed bicep, and be free from any abnormalities. They should move freely in the scrotum. The epididymis (coiled tube at the back of the testicles) should feel firm, but not swollen or hot or painful to touch.

Males with larger scrotum size tend to produce more semen and have progeny that reach puberty early. There are minimum scrotal circumference recommendations for rams and bucks, though scrotal size can vary with breed, age, size, season, and nutrition. The recommended minimums are 33 and 30 cm respectively, for mature and ram lambs. For bucks over 14 months of age, scrotal circumference should be at least 25 cm.



▲ A split or bipartite scrotum refers to a scrotum that is divided or split, rather than a continuous sac. While some consider it to be a defect, it has no effect on health or fertility and may be an adaptation to the heat. Split scrotums are more common in goats (>50%) and hair sheep, especially those reared in warmer climates.

▲ Epididymitis is a chronic infection of the epididymis caused by the bacterium *Brucella ovis*. It impairs fertility and is a significant problem in western range flocks. The disease is not always apparent (swelling) upon palpation. Blood tests will confirm the presence of *B. ovis*. In goats, a different bacteria (*Brucella melitensis*) is the cause.